GREAT CONVENTIONS OF YEARS GONE BY

First National Convention of the Democratic Party Held in 1835.

VAN BUREN FIRST NOMINEE

Why Douglas Was Put Aside for Buchanan—Three Cleveland Conventions.

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THE Democratic Convention which assembles in St. Louis on July 5 will be the twenty-first national gathering of the representatives of that party. The first was held on May 12, 1832, in Baltimore, and adopted two rules which have guided the actions of all subsequent conventions; one provided that the delegates, when so instructed, should cast the votes of their States as a unit, and the other that no candidate should be nominated without a two-third majority. Jackson was nominated for President and Van Buren for Vice-President. They were elected. The second convention met on May 26, 1835, at Baltimore, and nominated Van Buren for President and Richard M. Johnson for Vice-President. The third convention, held on May 5, 1840, in Baltimore, renominated Van Buren, but named no candidate for Vice-President, leaving that to the several States. It also put forward the first complete platform ever adopted by the party. Parts of this platform were incorporated into the deliverance of every Democratic National Convention prior to the Civil War, and its leading ideas have reappeared in many of the party platforms of the past forty years.

The First Democratic Dark Horse.

When 1844 came around and the Democratic National Convention again assembled at Baltimore, this time on May 27, it was found that Van Buren had a majority of the instructed delegates for his nomination. James K. Polk was a candidate for the Vice-President, and Jackson, then almost on his dying bed, exerted all his influence for Van Buren and Polk. The annexation of Texas, however, was the burning issue of the hour, and Van Buren had expressed his opposition to it. Moreover, there had been developed in New York some hostility to him, and some of the politicians in that State were determined to beat him. Thus the question with the annexationists and the other enemies of Van Buren in the convention was "How could he be defeated?" Again the two-thirds rule was introduced, and in spite of the fact that Van Buren had a majority of the convention instructed for him, it was adopted. Its adoption assured Van Buren's defeat. Neither Cass, Johnson nor Buchanan, the other prominent candidates, could compel success, and after a three days' struggle all three were put aside and the nomination given to Polk, who had aspired to nothing higher than the Vice-Presidency. Silas Wright, Van Buren's closest friend, was the convention's choice for second place on the ticket, but his declination to accept led to the selection of George M. Dallas, of Pennsylvania.

Polk, both in his Cabinet appointments and in the measures which he favored, had an eye to his own renomination; but his self-seeking led him to make the fatal blunder of connecting himself closely with one of the warring factions of the New York Democracy. On this ground it was manifest to the prudent, long before the Democratic National Convention at Baltimore, on May 22, 1848, that Polk's candidacy was out of the question, and he, therefore, was put aside. Cass, of Michigan; Woodbury, of New Hampshire, and Buchanan, of Pennsylvania, each had a considerable following when the convention opened, but Cass was the favorite from the first, and on the fourth ballot received the votes of more than two-thirds of the delegates. With him was nominated General William O. Butler, of Kentucky, for Vice-President.

The Nomination of Pierce and Buchanan.

A dark horse won in the Democratic National Convention held in Baltimore on June 1, 1852. There were four prominent candidates—Cass, Buchanan, Marcy and Douglas. Cass's candidacy was burdened with the stigma of defeat; Buchanan had not an attached personal following, Marcy suffered from the war of factions in his own State, New York, and Douglas was hampered by the enmities and jealousies which his sudden rise into prominence had provoked. From these conditions resulted a stormy session of four days, in the course of which forty-nine ballots were cast for President. Cass and Buchanan had the most votes at the beginning, but neither could obtain the necessary two-thirds. On the thirty-fifth ballot fifteen votes were cast for Franklin Pierce, of New Hampshire. Pierce up to that time had not been publicly menutioned as a candidate, but months before it had been planned by Caleb Cushing, Benjamin F. Butler and other New England politicians, in anticipation of a deadlock at Baltimore, to spring his name at the critical moment and trust to a stampede to insure his nomination. This plan was now rewarded with success. Pierce's vote steadily increased till the forty-ninth and last ballot, when the convention gave him 282 votes, with only six scattering. William R. King, of Alabama, was nominated for Vice-President, but did not live to fill the office.

The Democratic National Convention held at Cincinnati on June 2, 1856, lasted four days. The nomination was contested for by President Pierce, Buchanan and Douglas. The part Pierce and Douglas had taken in the repeal of the Missouri compromise weighed against them, while Buchanan, who had been out of the country for several years as Minister to England, had kept aloof from the disputes that were disrupting his party. Moreover, it was urged in his behalf that he could carry the admittedly doubtful State of Pennsylvania. He led in every ballot to the sixteenth, when he received 168 votes to 121 for Douglas and six scattering. Then Douglas ended the battle by telegraphing that, as Buchanan was clearly the choice of the majority of the delegates, he should be given the necessary two-third vote. This was done on the next ballot, and the convention completed its work by nominating John C. Breckinridge, of Kentucky, for Vice-President.

The Conventions of the Civil War Period.

The Democratic National Convention which met at Charleston, S. C., on April 12, 1860, was symbolic of the times. No candidate was chosen, though the convention lasted many days, this because of a disagreement between the Northern and Southern sections of the party on the slavery question. The Southern end of the party, supported by a few delegates from the free States, insisted upon the adoption of the doctrine absolute non-interference by Congress or any other authority with slavery in the Territories, while an overwhelming majority of the Northern end of the party was committed to Douglas and his dogma of popular sovereignty. A long and desperate wrangle revealed an impassible gulf between the factions, and when a majority of the delegates voted for a popular sovereignty platform the representatives of the cotton States withdrew from the convention.

Those who remained proceeded to ballot for President. Fifty-seven ballots were taken in three days, with Douglas always in the lead, but the previous adoption of the two-thirds rule made a choice impossible, and on May 3 the convention adjourned to meet in Baltimore on June 18. When the convention met in that place at that time there was a new hegira, which his time included most of the delegations which had replaced the previous seceders from the Southern States. Then, after taking two ballots, the convention decided that two-thirds of the vote should nominate, and Douglas was declared the candidate. Herschell V. Johnson, of Georgia, was afterward put on the ticket for Vice-President by the National Committee, Benjamin Fitzpatrick, of Alabama, nominated by the convention, having decided to serve as a candidate.

Those who bolted at Charleston met in another hall in that city, adopted an extreme pro-slavery platform, and decided to meet in Richmond on the second Monday in June. From that date they adjourned to June 21. Meantime the seceders from the Baltimore Convention organized a second convention in that city, and, adopting an anti-Southern platform, nominated John C. Breckinridge, of Kentucky, for President, and Joseph Lane, of Oregon, for Vice-President. These nominations were endorsed by the Charleston seceders in their final session at Richmond.

The main purpose of holding the Democratic National Convention, which met in Chicago on August 30, 1864, was to prevent the party organization from going wholly to pieces. It did little more than serve this purpose. Eleven Southern States, being then in rebellion, could not, of course, be represented, while in the North vast numbers, formerly associated with the Democratic party, had, at the opening of the war, allied themselves with the Republicans. A few days before the meeting of the convention, President Lincoln said to a friend: "They must nominate a peace Democrat on a war platform, or a war Democrat on a peace platform." The convention chose the second of these alternatives. It adopted a platform which declared the war a failure, and it nominated for President the best known of all the war Democrats, General George B. McClellan. The nomination for Vice-President, after a brief contest, was given to George H. Pendleton, of Ohio. Only three States ratified the convention's action.

When Seymour Was Made an Unwilling Candidate.

The unexpected happened in the Democratic National Convention which met in New York on July 4, 1868. Months before the convention assembled it had been decided by Horatio Seymour and other Democratic leaders that Salmon P. Chase who had become estranged from the Republican party, should be nominated for President, and, save for one man's craft this plan would have been carried into execution. That man was Samuel J. Tilden, who decided that the candidacy of Chase would spell defeat. Instead, he planned with subtle strategy to nominate Seymour. It had been arranged that Seymour, who had been chosen chairman of the convention, was to leave the chair and nominate Chase. This moment was chosen by Tilden for the fulfillment of his purpose, and when Seymour called another to preside, an Ohio delegate, selected for the occasion, sprang to his feet, and, in an impressive speech, demanded the nomination of Seymour, the confessed leader of the Democracy. Instantly men in other delegations, previously assigned to their task, rose and swelled the hurrah for Seymour, and when some of the New York delegates joined in the cheering, the end became evident to all. "Your candidate I cannot be," said Seymour, in a faltering voice, as he left the platform, but the wave surged on and he was made the nominee by a practically unanimous vote. Before that there had been twenty-one ballots, of which Pendleton, Hancock and Hendricks were the leading competitors. It was then that the nomination of Chase was expected to be made, just as the nomination of Seymour was made, through the generalship of Tilden. Seymour, prevailed upon to reconsider the subject, reluctantly submitted to the result thus achieved, and the convention completed its work by nominating Frank P. Blair, of Missouri, for Vice-President.

The Democratic National Convention held at Baltimore on July 9, 1872, was a dull and lifeless affair, it having been settled before it met that the only hope for the Democracy was to indorse the action of the Liberal Republicans, who had nominated Horace Greeley for President. On the other hand, the convention, which opened at St. Louis on June 27, 1876, was one of the most interesting and instructive in the history of the party. Its issue proved Samuel J. Tilden to be one of the master politicians of his time. From the Governor's office at Albany, Tilden planned and carried into execution a campaign for the Presidency that was at once the less methodical and sagacious. Consent was secured of the delegations from most of the doubtful States, and a watch-eye kept upon the men chosen as delegates. As a result of this early and complete organization, it was a Tilden body that convened at St. Louis with discrete and able leaders to shape and direct the work. Thomas A. Hendricks, of Indiana was also in the field as a candidate, and his suporters, though zealous and aggresive, were outclassed in leadership, and fought from the first against helpless odds. Tilden was promptly declared the nominee, and second place given to Hendricks.

The Nomination of General Hancock.

The adroit sleight-of-hand work of William C. Whitney, laboring in the interest of his father-in-lay, Henry B. Payne, of Ohio, alone prevented the renomination of Tilden in the Democratic National Convention held on June 2, 1880, at Cincinnati. Whitney's efforts, however, bore reward, for he met opposition where he did not expect to find it, and that was in the Ohio delegation, which refused to present Payne's name unanimously. With Tilden out of the race, and Payne's candidacy strangled at birth, the nomination either of Thomas F. Bayard or Samuel J. Randall semed probable; but again the unexpected befell. Daniel Dougherty who had journeyed to Cincinnati solely as a spectator, at the twelfth hour obtained the proxy of a Pennsylvania delegate, and presented the name of General Wingfield S. Hancock in a spech of such beauty and impressiveness that it swayed the convention off its feet, and Hancock was nominated on the first ballot. He had not a majority when the balot closed, but changes made before the result was announced gave him the requisite two-thirds vote. With him was nominated William H. English, of Indiana, for Vice-President.

An interesting condition of affairs confronted the Democratic National Convention held at Chicago on July 8, 1884. Tilden's failing health forbade his candidacy, and there were numerous entries in the scrub race that folowed, including Bayard, McDonald, Thurman, Carlisle, Headley and Randall, but all these veteran leaders were put aside for a man who four years before had ben practically unknown outside of his own town. In 1882 Grover Cleveland, while Mayor of Buffalo, was elected Governor of New York by a plurality of 190,000, due almost entirely to a biter factional fight within the Republican party. The very prodigality of this majority fastened upon him the eyes of his party, and caused Daniel Manning, one of the shrewdest of the politicians trained by Tilden, to fix upon him as the most available candidate for the Presidential nomination. Manning began the canvass for Cleveland's nomination immediately after the latter's inauguration as Governor. This canvass was conducted with great skill, and in less than a year powerful combination had been effected with the Democratic leaders in most of the Southern States. Moreover, Manning contrived, by the adoption of the unit rule, to carry the New York delegation solid for Cleveland, though Tammany stoutly opposed him. Thus it became evident at an early stage of the convention that Cleveland would be the nominee. All that was needed to insure this result was the aid of the friends of Randall, who had a delegation from his own State strongly commited to his support, but whose pronounced protection views made him ineligible for the nomination. Randall summoned by telegraph, reached Chicago on the morning of the last day of the convention, and, after a brief conference with Manning, passed the word to his friends to support Cleveland. That settled the contest. More than two-thirds of the delegates voted for Cleveland on the second and final ballots, and his nomination was made unanimous, on motion of Thomas A. Hendricks, who was subsequently named for Vice-President.

The Second and Third Cleveland Conventions.

The Democratic National Convention held at St. Louis on June 7, 1888, met to register a purpose fully agreed upon in advance. President Cleveland was renominated by a practically unanimous vote, and second place on the ticket was given without a dissenting voice to Allen G. Thurman, of Ohio. But if the second Cleveland convention was a perfunctory affair, the one which met at Chicago on June 21, 1892, was marked by desperate and acrimonious strife. Cleveland was a third time put forward as a candidate, but, strong with the people, he was also weak with the political leaders. The delegation from his own State of New York was solidly opposed to him, and had a majority of the delegates from other States followed their personal inclinations he would have been defeated. Cleveland's nomination was affected solely by the superb leadership of Wiliam C. Whitney, whose work at Chicago was brilliant in the extreme. He outwitted the opposition at every point, instantly took advantage of every opportunity, and from start to finish displayed the political generalship that never falters and never makes mistakes. Test votes were carefully avoided and Cleveland handled as a single-ballot candidate, who, if not nominated at first, would not be nominated at all. Held firmly in this line of action by Whitney's strategy, the convention sat at night and far on in the morning hours, when Cleveland received 617 votes, just ten more than were needed to nominate him. Had he not ben nominated on that balot his defeat would have ben certain, and as it was, the nomination of Adlai E. Stevenson, of Illinois, for Vice-President was made over his friends.

The Democratic National Convention of 1896 was held at Chicago on July 7, and continued its sessions through five days, nominating William J. Bryan, of Nebraska, for President, and Arthur Sewall, of Maine, for Vice-President, upon a free silver platform. Bryan's nomination was the issue of a long and spirited struggle betwen a number of candidates, in which at the beginning Richard P. Bland, of Missouri, had the best position. Bryan made hi sfirst impression on the convention at the third day's session, when, owing to the illness of the chairman of the committee on platform, he was assigned to make the closing argument in support of the committee's report. A brilliant speechmaker, of the class especially admired in the South and West, his oration, full of striking metaphor, held his 20,000 hearers spellbound. At the last period fell from Bryan's lips "You shall not press down upon the brows of labor this crown of thorns; you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold," there was an instant's hush, and then a storm burst forth whose fury seemed to sweep everything before it. Thunderous cheers rent the air, while hats, flags, handkerchiefs and everything else that could be thrown aloft or wave wildly were brought into use. Bedlam reigned for many minutes, and even after an enforced lull, it broke forth afresh at every mention of Bryan's name. On the folowing day, when the balloting began the weaker candidates dropped out one by one, their broken support dividing itself between Bland and Bryan, till, after the fourth ballot when there was a stampede to Bryan, which ended in his nomination.

The latest Democratic National Convention is of such recent occurrence as to be fresh in the minds of all. It was held on July 6, 1900, at Kansas City. Bryan and his friends were in complete control of the convention, and he was renominated on the first ballot, second place on the ticket, after a brief struggle, being given to ex-Vice-President Stevenson.

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